News release

Smoke plume disappearing

14 December 2005

The bulk of the smoke from the fire at the Buncefield oil depot is gradually dispersing and diluting in the atmosphere.

Soon after the explosion on Sunday the smoke plume was highly visible on satellite imagery, this is no longer the case. A residual plume from the remaining controlled fire is visible locally, heading in a southerly direction.

The Met Office has expertise and experience in modelling these types of releases into the atmosphere and throughout the incident has worked closely with other agencies and groups to provide up-to-date assessments of the situation.

The Met Office uses a complex computer dispersion model which utilises the detailed three-dimensional wind patterns within our weather forecasting models to produce detailed predictions of the development and movement of plumes and how much pollution could reach the ground.

The model has been developed over 20 years and has been successfully applied to a wide range of atmospheric pollution problems such as:

- nuclear incidents;
- volcanic eruptions;
- spread of animal disease e.g. foot and mouth;
- air quality forecasting.

Anyone still concerned about the effects of the smoke is advised to contact NHS Direct or the Health Protection Agency. For environmental enquiries please contact Defra.

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